

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 17th May, 2023.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor A.M. Collins (Chair); Councillors J. Aviet, G.D.D. Carroll, S.M. Hanks, W.A. Hennessy, S. Lloyd-Selby, B. Loveluck-Edwards, M.J.G. Morgan and S.D. Perkes.

Also present: C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative), D. Dutch, V. John and H. Smith (Representatives from Tenant Working Group / Panel), Councillors I.R. Buckley, L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources), C.P. Franks, C. Iannucci, G. John (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing), N.C. Thomas, E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health) and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

27 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

28 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR –

RESOLVED – T H A T Councillor B. Loveluck-Edwards be appointed Vice-Chair for the Municipal year.

29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillor G.M. Ball and S. Campbell, and G. Doyle (Representative from Tenant Working Group / Panel).

30 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 19th April, 2023 be approved as a correct record.

31 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

32 PRESENTATION: HER VOICE WALES –

The presentation was given to the Committee by the Senior Youth Engagement Worker in Participation, Rights Ambassador Project Worker and members of the Her Voice Wales group, a group of girls aged 13 – 17 from the Vale of Glamorgan who met to discuss issues around equality in their local communities and other related matters.

The group had been focussing on sexual harassment and were undertaking the '#WEDONTFEELSAFE' campaign, in order to help tackle sexual harassment and other threats to young person's (particularly women's) safety in public areas. As part of this, the group had undertaken a survey with young people in the Vale concerning their thoughts and feelings around their safety in their local communities. There were 129 respondents to the survey. Subsequently a report of the findings from the survey was produced which was shared with, and presented to, stakeholders and other potential partners who could help to effect change and support in tackling the concerns raised by the survey, which included:

- The importance of greater street lighting, a larger police presence and improved CCTV in order to help young people feel safer, as well as the implementation of "Safe Spaces" across the Vale. This would consist of a network of public spaces such as libraries, leisure centres and shops where young people could seek safety and sanctuary if required. The scheme was run nationally by the Safe Places National Network and had been adopted by Cardiff Council, with 78 locations already in the network, which had proved successful. By becoming a member of the network, the Vale of Glamorgan Council could access support in launching the scheme. The annual membership fee was £395, or £7.60 a week. Training would be provided to participating businesses or premises and it was free for them to join. The member benefits would include access to information on the website and there was a map for young people to see where their local safe spaces were and a 'get me to the nearest safe space' button for emergency situations as well.
- Another concern raised from the survey were the very small numbers of young people who felt confident to, and/or did not understand how best to, report sexual harassment and 'cat calling' to the Police. In order to address this, the Her Voice Wales Group had produced a number of posters in order to raise awareness among young people on sexual harassment and the process in order to report it.

Following the presentation, a number of questions and comments were made by the Committee and other guests:

- The Chair and others on the Committee stressed the importance of the Council looking into the possibility of implementing the 'Safe Spaces' programme within the Vale in order to ensure the safety of young persons and others locally.
- Councillor Perkes referred to the recent national press about women feeling unsafe in public spaces, such as on public transport (which had been raised in

the survey undertaken by Her Voice Wales also). This tied in with the development of sustainable transport and town centres, which fell within the remit of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and asked that the presentation be considered for referral to this Committee and any others which were relevant.

- The Vice-Chair asked about support provided by Cardiff Council and South Wales Police on safe spaces, etc. It was explained that the Safer Spaces network in Cardiff had been helped financially through the 'Safer Streets' bid. The police (both South Wales Police and British Transport Police) had been onboard with the initiative also, i.e. attending the presentations on the report, as well as assisting with the distribution of posters produced by the group and had asked them to do a social media 'takeover' with South Wales Police. On the Vice-Chair's follow up point on tying in with the 'Ask for Angela' campaign, it was explained that due its emphasis on the night-time economy, this would not be directly appropriate for the type of safe spaces envisaged for young people by Her Voice Wales, with the focus on local shops, libraries, leisure centres etc instead.
- Councillor Carroll echoed the issues raised by the Her Voice Wales group around street lighting and CCTV and suggested greater collaboration between Elected Members and the group in helping to address their mutual concerns. On his question concerning the fee for membership of the Safer Spaces scheme, it was clarified that the fee would be paid by the Council, and it would be free for businesses and other premises joining this scheme.
- Councillor Morgan emphasised the need for this presentation and the original report, etc. to be shared with as many Elected Members, Committees and other stakeholders as possible to help achieve the group's aims.
- Councillor Lloyd-Selby commented on the high response rate to the survey and whether there were any 'gaps' in terms of responses from young people in certain communities within the Vale. It was explained that a high number of respondents to the survey came from the more urban areas of the Vale (such as Barry), rather than rural areas and with less respondents in the 17 plus age group. The Councillor suggested reaching out to the Council's Rural Champion in order to help raise awareness within rural areas. On the Councillor's other question around young people reporting sexual harassment, there was now a drive to reach out to this group via social media and through the group's poster campaign in schools, surgeries, etc, as well as online to raise awareness on reporting sexual harassment. The Councillor suggested that the group share their posters and other materials with Elected Members too, in order to help get that message across to young people and communities within the Vale.
- The Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources stressed the importance of the presentation and the challenges around significant numbers of young people (particularly young women) who either did not feel safe or rarely felt safe walking home. The Leader had had conversations with the Chief Constable of South Wales Police and Transport for Wales (TfW) regarding the Her Voice Wales group and they were keen to learn more about their work. It would also be beneficial for Members to go out and about to their communities in order to look at some of the issues raised by the presentation that may apply to their wards.

- The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services wished to add the need to look at engineering solutions and public space design to make these as safe as possible for young people and other residents. He also suggested that the group reach out to Penarth Town Council in order to make their presentation on this topic to them.
- The Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing referred to the work done in Llantwit Major concerning street lighting for country lanes, where Section 106 funding was used for two of these to install street lighting. This served a great purpose for people leaving bus stops on the main road and walking up the country lanes, when going home at night. The Rights Ambassador Project Worker stated that this was exactly what younger people were looking for in terms of having lighting in those transport hubs such as bus stops and train platforms and walking through these areas, particularly in more rural and isolated spots.
- Councillor Franks, with permission to speak, referred to the local campaigns undertaken at Dina Powys to provide street lighting to public footpaths, etc following an incident of assault. It had been a challenge to secure funding for these and there were still other footpaths, etc. that needed lighting also. He, and Councillor Carroll suggested that a letter be written to Cabinet regarding the need to fund additional street lighting of footpaths. The Her Voice Wales group would take this up and write to both the Cabinet and TfW as part of their campaign.
- The Head of Housing and Building Services also suggested to the Her Voice Wales group that they highlight their concerns and made representations to the Youth Cabinet and the Community Safety Partnership, which would also help inform the Community Safety Strategy. This was because the issues raised by the group would require a multi-agency approach. In terms of funding, there was the 'Safer Streets' scheme which provided money from the Home Office to the Police and Crime Commissioner for such initiatives. Bids were then made for this money by Local Authorities. In terms of what the Council could do to support the group's findings, it could i.e. help to identify those hotspots where young people did not feel safe in order to look at providing or bolstering CCTV coverage. Council officers could also look at other ways of supporting the group and look to report back to the Committee on the community safety aspects raised.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the presentation subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the presentation be referred to the Environment and Regeneration and Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committees for their consideration.
- (2) T H A T the presentation be shared with other relevant bodies, i.e. the Vale of Glamorgan Community Safety Partnership, as well with the Vale of Glamorgan Council Rural Champion.
- (3) T H A T Officers explore options around the possible creation of "Safe Spaces" across the Vale of Glamorgan and to provide a report on this when practicable.

(4) T H A T the original report from Her Voice Wales be shared with all Elected Members of the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) In order that the Environment and Regeneration and Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committees consider the presentation, the issues and work undertaken relating to Her Voice Wales.

(2) In order to raise awareness of the issues and work undertaken relating to Her Voice Wales, and to address areas where these bodies and the Rural Champion could help support it.

(3) In order to look at the possibility of establishing “Safe Space” areas at various locations accessible to young people within the Vale of Glamorgan.

(4) In order to raise awareness among Elected Members around the issues and work undertaken relating to Her Voice Wales.

33 VALE OF GLAMORGAN RAPID REHOUSING PLAN (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 27th April, 2023 was presented to the Committee by the Head of Housing and Building Services, in conjunction with the Operational Manager, Public Housing Services. The reference sought the Committee’s consideration and comment on the Council’s Rapid Rehousing Plan, following its agreement by Cabinet in principle.

It was a requirement for all Welsh Local Authorities to produce and submit this Plan for Welsh Government (WG) approval, it being added that the Plan would help to address the current crisis in housing being experienced in the Vale of Glamorgan and in other parts of Wales.

The Plan recognised that the current use of certain forms of temporary accommodation, such as hotels, bed and breakfast, hostels and shared housing was not the ideal provision or response to rehousing and homelessness, in that it did not provide a stable or sound foundation for families and those individuals impacted moving forward. Therefore, a multi-agency and multi-faceted approach was required involving the Council and its Housing Solutions Team in conjunction with other partners to help achieve this.

A key demographic housing need (but not the only one) which required to be addressed was single, younger people.

A key aim of the Plan was to ensure that homelessness became preventable or was short-lived for persons and families impacted by it. Therefore, the Plan outlined a number of potential actions and solutions to the housing crisis faced in the Vale (some of which were based on the Committee’s Task and Finish Group’s work and recommendations around housing and homelessness provision undertaken last year), including:

- New social housing developments
- Private landlords increasing their portfolios
- New Council owned temporary accommodation
- Prevention work
- Homeless Leasing
- Shared accommodation pilot
- Changes to the Homes4U Policy
- Changes to properties with age designation (reducing the minimum age from 55 to 30) and properties subject to local lettings policies.

Following this, the Committee and others made a number of comments and queries:

On Councillor Aviet's questions concerning the 'hidden homeless' and where single working people who were on very low incomes, could not afford private house renting and 'sofa surfed' fitted in to this Plan, it was explained that the 240 households living in temporary accommodation in the Vale included single working people (on low incomes). Also, any persons who were homeless but working could also approach the Housing Solutions Team in order to get housing advice, support and assess what the best housing solution would be for them in terms of their financial means, etc. with the opportunity to be put in the appropriate housing needs band and be able to make bids on properties. In terms of those persons 'sofa surfing', if they presented to the Council as homeless or in serious housing need, they would also be banded accordingly in terms of their circumstances, which would increase their ability to bid successfully for accommodation. It was stressed that the Rapid Rehousing Plan dealt with specific issues and priorities and that the Council's Local Housing Market Strategy dealt with the wider housing needs of Vale residents at various levels and not just homelessness, i.e. from social housing to low cost purchasing options.

Regarding Councillor Lloyd Selby's question on what discussions the Council had with those hotel and bed and breakfast providers in the Vale who offered temporary accommodation around greater flexibility for their residents to be able to self-cater (in their rooms as part of a wider improvement of their living conditions), it was explained that discussions had been undertaken with these establishments and they were now allowing fridges in residents' rooms to keep key foodstuffs and milk chilled, but they could not allow microwaves, toasters, air fryers, etc. in their rooms due to fire risks and their insurance liabilities. This remained a key challenge and inherent problem with using such premises, but the Council worked closely with these providers and through consultation with residents in order to mitigate this issue as much as possible. On the Councillor's other query concerning the approach to revising the age designation for Council housing (also raised by Councillor Hanks), and whether this would be a blanket approach or on a case-by-case basis (following consultation with existing residents and taking into account their needs), it was explained that this would be on the latter basis, with such an approach having been used previously with a successful conclusion. As part of this, older residents would be offered more bespoke accommodation (such as the development in Penarth) and support, in line with this demographic's increasing housing needs. An Older Persons Housing Strategy had also been developed.

Councillor Morgan wished to stress the need for the Council to 'balance' the key demands of both the younger and older populations in the Vale in terms of housing. He stated that by 2035 the population over the age of 75 in the Vale of Glamorgan would have increased by 70%.

On the Vice Chair's query concerning the proposed temporary suspension of the Homes4U policy, it was explained that the suspension would allow the Council, as with other Local Authorities in Wales, to address the current housing crisis, which had seen a rise in rough sleepers within the Vale. The minimum duration for this would likely need to be 12 months. The suspension of the policy would require Cabinet authority and Council approval, as well as, following Councillor Lloyd Selby's comments, the need to take into account the needs of those people who were currently on the waiting list. On the follow up question regarding the issue of 'furniture poverty' for tenants, it was explained that help could be provided by the Council via the Housing Support Grant and via other funding i.e. discretionary loans for tenants to obtain furniture and other fittings such as carpets. The Vice Chair also suggested regular updates on the progress of the Plan, as well as the Council needing to address how it shapes its housing strategy around young people and future generations and to give equal weight to the Older Persons Housing Strategy.

On Councillor Hanks' query on new council owned temporary accommodation, it was confirmed that the Eagleswell Road development would include the temporary housing of Ukrainian refugees in order to help alleviate resettlement pressures. In the longer term, the site would be used for permanent housing to meet the needs of the wider community. On the Councillor's follow up comments around additional WG funding for housing in the Vale, WG was providing substantial funding to assist the Vale and other Councils to provide accommodation such as through the Empty Homes Strategy, grants to tackle homelessness and the Housing Support Grant. These funding streams were usually on an annual basis.

On Councillor Perkes' query about the lessons learned from the establishment of 'mixed' communities following previous examples of lowering the age designation on Council accommodation, it was explained that this would be done on a site-by-site basis, looking at the suitability of accommodation within and with the provision of intensive management as well as support to help such communities flourish and be sustainable.

Both the Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources and the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Wellbeing (both of whom currently shared the portfolio for Public Sector Housing and Tenant Engagement) emphasised the current crisis and demand in housing within the Vale and that 'doing nothing was not an option'. The Rapid Rehousing Plan would help to ensure the dignity of Vale residents impacted by the housing crisis and help them build more sustainable lives. The relaxing of age restrictions on Council accommodation, if done correctly, could lead to the subsequent establishment of successful intergenerational communities.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the Cabinet reference and report subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the following comments be reported back to Cabinet as part of their consideration of the report, prior to the final submission of the Rapid Rehousing Plan to Welsh Government:

- The report and Plan should provide a more explicit reassurance that any decision to remove or revise the age designation on selected Council owned accommodation and housing would be made on a case-by-case basis, as well as taking into account the needs of existing residents.
- The report and Plan should provide a greater recognition that if consideration was given to suspending the Homes4U policy, that this should take into account the needs of those who were currently on the waiting list.

(2) T H A T the Committee receives regular updates on the work being undertaken as part of the Rapid Rehousing Plan.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) In order that Cabinet be informed of the comments or recommendations made as part of their consideration of the Rapid Rehousing Plan prior to its submission to Welsh Government, as well as reflecting the reassurance given by Housing Services at the Committee meeting on these matters.

(2) In order that the Committee can consider and scrutinise the progress made and challenges faced by the Plan over the next 5 years on a regular basis.

34 4TH QUARTER SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION TRACKING 2022/23 AND PROPOSED ANNUAL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME SCHEDULE 2023/24 (DCR) –

The report, presented by the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer, advised Members of progress in relation to the Scrutiny Committee's historical recommendations and the proposed Annual Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2023/24 –

- 2019-20 Uncompleted Recommendation Tracking (Appendix A);
- 2021-22 Uncompleted Recommendation Tracking (Appendix B);
- 4th Quarter Recommendation Tracking January – March 2023 (Appendix C);
- Cabinet Annual Forward Work Programme 2023/24 (Appendix D); and
- Proposed Annual Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2023/24 (Appendix E).

The report also provided a restatement around the key principles of scrutiny and to encourage Members of the Committee and other stakeholders to have a greater engagement with the Scrutiny process and to make suggestions around reports and other items for the Committee to consider. As part of this, there would be meetings between Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs to meet to allow

both the Cabinet and Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes to be developed and agreed. Also, at Agenda Conferences with Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Committees, management of the Committees' Work Programmes would be included as a standing item on the agendas for consideration and discussion.

Also, the relevant hyperlinks would be added to those previous historic reports and presentations cited in the 'Origin of Report, Links to Corporate Plan Objectives, and Previous Related Documents' column of the Forward Work Programme Schedule, prior to uploading it to the Council website.

Following this, the Vice-Chair asked if the background paper on the report concerning Scrutiny protocol from 2017 was still fit for purpose taking into consideration this 'relaunch' and if there was capacity for the Committee to look at ensuring that it aligned with what Scrutiny was trying to achieve. It was explained that this would be looked into and reported back to Committee as part of the next quarterly report on Recommendation Tracking and the Forward Work Programme.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the status of the actions listed in Appendices A to C to the report be agreed.
- (2) T H A T the Cabinet Annual Forward Work Programme for 2023/24 attached at Appendix D, in the context of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee Annual Forward Work Programme 2023/24 content, be noted.
- (3) T H A T the Committee's proposed Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2023/24 attached at Appendix E to the report be approved and uploaded to the Council's website, subject to the following amendment being made:
 - That the relevant hyperlinks be added to those previous historic reports and presentations cited in the 'Origin of Report, Links to Corporate Plan Objectives, and Previous Related Documents' column of the Forward Work Programme Schedule.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) To maintain effective tracking of the Committee's recommendations.
- (2) To align with section 7.6 of the Cabinet and Scrutiny Roles and Responsibilities Protocol.
- (3) For public information.